

## **The Aesthetics of Matter**

# European Avant-Garde and Modernism Studies

Etudes sur l'avant-garde  
et le modernisme en Europe

Studien zur europäischen  
Avantgarde und Moderne

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Edited by Sascha Bru and Peter Nicholls

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## Volume 3

# **The Aesthetics of Matter**

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Modernism, the Avant-Garde and Material Exchange

Edited by  
Sarah Posman, Anne Reverseau, David Ayers,  
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## **About the Series – Sur la collection – Zur Buchreihe**

*The avant-garde and modernism take centre-stage within European academia today. The experimental literatures and arts in Europe between ca. 1850 and 1950, and their aftermath, figure prominently on curricula, while modernism and avant-garde studies have come to form distinct yet interlocking disciplines within the humanities in recent years. These disciplines take on various guises on the continent. Within French and German academia, “modernism” remains a term rather alien – “die Moderne” and “modernité” coming perhaps the closest to what is meant by “modernism” within the English context. Here, indeed, modernism has acquired a firm place in research, signaling above all a period in modern poetics and aesthetics, roughly between 1850 and 1950, during which a revolt against prevalent traditions in art, literature and culture took shape. Similarly, the term “avant-garde” comes with an array of often conflicting connotations. For some, the avant-garde marks the most radically experimental arts and literatures in modernism from the nineteenth century onward – the early twentieth-century vanguard movements of Futurism, Expressionism, Dada and Surrealism, among others, coinciding with the avant-garde’s most “heroic” phase. For others, the avant-garde belongs to a cultural or conceptual order differing altogether from that of modernism – the vanguard exploits from the 1950s onward marking that avant-garde arts and literatures can also perfectly abide outside modernism.*

European Avant-Garde and Modernism Studies, far from aiming to reduce the complexity of various European research traditions, aspires to embrace the wide linguistic, terminological and methodological variety within both fields. Publishing an anthology of essays in English, French and German every two years, the series wishes to compare and relate French, German and British, but also Northern and Southern as well as Central and Eastern European findings in avant-garde and modernism studies.

Collecting essays stemming mainly from the biennial conferences of the European Network for Avant-Garde and Modernism Studies (EAM), books in this series do not claim to exhaustiveness. Rather, they aim to raise questions, to provide partial answers, to fill lacunae in the research, and to stir debate about the European avant-garde and modernism throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The series attaches great value to interdisciplinary and intermedial research on experimental aesthetics and poetics, and intends to encourage an interest in the cultural dimensions and contexts of the avant-garde and modernism in Europe. A digital addendum to the book series can be found on the website of the EAM: [www.eam-europe.be](http://www.eam-europe.be). There, readers can consult and add to an open-source bibliography

*of books in avant-garde and modernism studies, maintained by Gunther Martens (Ghent University). At present the bibliography already counts several thousands of titles in English, French and German, and it is our hope that it can become a vital point of reference in the exchange of expertise.*

L'avant-garde et le modernisme occupent actuellement une place majeure dans les universités européennes. Les arts et les littératures expérimentaux en Europe de 1850 à 1950 et au-delà font partie intégrante des programmes universitaires, tandis que les recherches sur l'avant-garde et le modernisme sont devenues, à l'intérieur des sciences humaines, des disciplines à part entière mais solidaires les unes des autres. Ces disciplines varient néanmoins à travers le continent. Dans les universités françaises et allemandes, la notion de « modernisme » reste plutôt étrangère : les notions de « modernité » et de « die Moderne » s'utilisent sans doute davantage pour ce que désigne la notion de « modernism » dans le contexte anglophone. Dans la recherche anglophone, en effet, la notion de « modernism » a acquis une certaine stabilité : elle désigne avant tout une période de la modernité poétique et esthétique, approximativement entre 1850 et 1950, au cours de laquelle a pris forme une révolte contre les traditions artistiques, littéraires et culturelles prédominantes. De la même façon, la notion d'« avant-garde » prend des connotations divergentes, souvent conflictuelles. Pour certains, l'« avant-garde » désigne les arts et les littératures les plus radicalement expérimentaux qui se développent à l'intérieur du modernisme à partir du 19<sup>ème</sup> siècle. Dans ce cas, les mouvements avant-gardistes du début du 20<sup>ème</sup> siècle – dont le futurisme, l'expressionnisme, le dadaïsme et le surréalisme – correspondent à la phase avant-gardiste la plus « héroïque ». Pour d'autres, l'avant-garde appartient à un ordre culturel et conceptuel entièrement différent du modernisme. Dans cette perspective, l'avant-garde survit au modernisme, comme en témoigne la permanence d'une sensibilité avant-gardiste après 1950.

Loin de vouloir réduire la complexité et la variété des traditions de recherche européennes, *Etudes sur l'avant-garde et le modernisme en Europe* vise à embrasser la grande diversité linguistique, terminologique et méthodologique à l'intérieur de ces deux domaines de recherche. Par la publication d'un volume d'essais en anglais, en français et en allemand tous les deux ans, la collection souhaite comparer et mettre en rapport les résultats issus des traditions de recherche française, anglaise et allemande, mais également d'Europe nordique et méridionale, centrale et orientale.

Le premier objectif de cette collection est de rassembler une sélection des textes présentés lors des rencontres bisannuelles du Réseau européen de recherche sur l'avant-garde et le modernisme (EAM). En ce sens, son ambition est moins d'épuiser un sujet que de soulever des questions, de suggérer quelques

réponses provisoires, de combler certaines lacunes dans la recherche et, plus généralement, de maintenir vivant le débat sur l'avant-garde et le modernisme européens au cours des 19<sup>ème</sup> et 20<sup>ème</sup> siècles. La collection attache beaucoup d'importance à la recherche interdisciplinaire et intermédiaire sur les esthétiques et les poétiques expérimentales et se propose de stimuler l'intérêt pour les dimensions culturelles et contextuelles de l'avant-garde et du modernisme en Europe. Un complément numérique à la collection est offert par le site web de l'EAM : [www.eam-europe.be](http://www.eam-europe.be). En ces pages, les lecteurs trouveront en libre accès, avec la possibilité d'y ajouter de nouvelles références, une bibliographie de livres sur l'avant-garde et le modernisme. La supervision et la mise à jour permanente de ce site sont assurées par Gunther Martens (Université de Gand). Actuellement, cette bibliographie comprend déjà plusieurs milliers d'entrées en anglais, en français et en allemand, et on peut espérer que cette banque de données se développera en un point de rencontre et d'échange de nos expertises.

*Forschungsinitiativen zum Thema Avantgarde und Moderne nehmen in der europäischen Forschungslandschaft weiterhin zu. Die experimentellen Literaturen und die Künste in Europa zwischen ca. 1850 und 1950 und ihre Nachwirkungen sind als Lehr- und Forschungsbereiche an den europäischen Forschungsinstitutionen und in den Lehrplänen heutzutage nicht mehr wegzudenken. Avantgarde und Moderne haben sich in den letzten Jahrzehnten zu unterschiedlichen, aber mehrfach miteinander verzahnten Forschungsgebieten entwickelt. Innerhalb der französischen und deutschen akademischen Welt bleibt der Sammelbegriff „modernism“ weniger geläufig – „die (klassische) Moderne“ und „modernité“ fungieren hier als nahe liegende Äquivalente zu demjenigen, was im internationalen Kontext als eine zeitliche und räumliche Ko-Okkurenz künstlerischer Ausdrucksformen und ästhetischer Theorien namhaft gemacht werden kann, die ungefähr zwischen 1850 und 1950 angesiedelt werden kann. Auf ähnliche Weise entfaltet die Bezeichnung „Avantgarde“ eine Reihe häufig widersprüchlicher Konnotationen. Für manche kennzeichnet die Avantgarde den radikalsten experimentellen Bruch der Künste und Literaturen mit den Darstellungs- und Erzählkonventionen des 19. Jahrhundert: im frühen zwanzigsten Jahrhundert zeugen davon Avantgardebewegungen wie Futurismus, Expressionismus, Dada und Surrealismus, Strömungen, die als die „heroische“ Phase der Avantgarde bezeichnet werden können. Ab den fünfziger Jahren kommt diese Avantgarde weitgehend ohne modernistische Begleiterscheinung aus. Für andere gehört die Avantgarde zu einem kulturellen Umfeld, das sich, durchaus im Bunde mit der Klassischen Moderne, der Erneuerung ästhetischer Konventionen verschreibt.*

Die Buchreihe Studien zur europäischen Avantgarde und Moderne möchte der Kompliziertheit der unterschiedlichen europäischen Forschungstraditionen

gerecht werden und strebt danach, die breite linguistische, terminologische und methodologische Vielfalt abzudecken. Anhand einer zweijährlichen Sammlung von Beiträgen in englischer, französischer und deutscher Sprache möchte die Reihe nicht nur die französisch-, deutsch- und englischsprachigen, sondern auch die nord-, süd-, zentral- und osteuropäischen Ergebnisse der Avantgarde- und Moderne-Forschung einbeziehen.

*Die Aufsatzsammlungen der Reihe, die größtenteils aus Beiträgen von den zweijährlichen Konferenzen des Europäischen Netzwerks für Studien zu Avantgarde und Moderne (EAM) bestehen, erheben keinen Anspruch auf Vollständigkeit. Ihr Ziel ist es vielmehr, Fragen zu stellen, einige Antworten vorzuschlagen, Forschungslücken zu schließen und Debatten über die europäische Avantgarde und die Moderne im neunzehnten und zwanzigsten Jahrhundert auszulösen.*

*Die Studien zur europäischen Avantgarde und Moderne legen viel Wert auf die interdisziplinäre und intermediale Erforschung experimenteller Ästhetiken/Poetiken und setzen es sich zum Ziel, das Interesse an den kulturellen Zusammenhängen und Kontexten der Avantgarde und der Moderne in Europa anzuregen. Ein digitales Addendum zur Buchreihe befindet sich auf der Internetseite des EAM: [www.eam-europe.be](http://www.eam-europe.be). Dort können unsere Leser eine frei zugängliche Bibliographie zu Publikationen über Avantgarde und Moderne, die von Gunther Martens (Universität Gent) verwaltet wird, besichtigen und ergänzen. Die Bibliographie enthält derzeit einige Tausend Titel auf Deutsch, Englisch und Französisch und wir hoffen, dass sie ein wichtiges Forum für den Austausch von Fachkenntnissen präsentieren wird.*

Leuven & New York, 2013

Sascha Bru & Peter Nicholls

Previous books in this series:

*Europa! Europa? The Avant-Garde, Modernism and the Fate of a Continent*, ed. by Sascha Bru, Jan Baetens, Benedikt Hjartarson, Peter Nicholls, Tania Ørum and Hubert van den Berg (2009).

*Regarding the Popular. Modernism, the Avant-Garde and High and Low Culture*, ed. by Sascha Bru, Laurence van Nuijs, Benedikt Hjartarson, Peter Nicholls, Tania Ørum and Hubert van den Berg (2011).

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## Introduction



# Matter on the Move

“Modernism”, Mina Loy tells us,

has democratized the subject matter and *la belle matière* of art; through cubism the newspaper has assumed an aesthetic quality, through Cézanne a plate has become more than something to put an apple upon, Brancusi has given an evangelistic import to eggs, and Gertrude Stein has given us the Word, in and for itself.<sup>1</sup>

In modernism and the avant-garde the very matter of life, rather than the big events structuring histories, enter the spotlight. Where 19<sup>th</sup>-century realism portrayed the (bourgeois) individual, modernist and avant-garde art and writing often focus on the things that surround people, the houses and cities we live in, the bodies we call ours, the sensations we experience and the words our consciousnesses spill. In addition to a shift in subject matter, these projects implied a change in method. If in Stein, for Loy, the medium becomes the message, then the new painter, in Tristan Tzara’s words, “no longer paints (symbolic and illusionistic reproduction) but creates directly in stone, wood, iron, tin, rocks, or locomotive structures capable of being spun in all directions by the limpid wind of momentary sensation”.<sup>2</sup>

We could quote many modernist and avant-garde practitioners stressing the importance of matter to their aesthetics, both in terms of how they saw the world and of how they wanted to create. Where those individual projects have received ample critical attention, little effort has been made to extend the scope and explore what an experimental aesthetics of matter, from early twentieth-century modernism and the avant-gardes to the neo-avant-gardes, amounts to. This volume charts the status of matter in a variety of aesthetic projects and shows that while the challenges early 20<sup>th</sup>-century artists and writers faced in terms of art’s *belle matière*, materials and media have undergone major changes, our contemporary fascination with “vibrant matter”<sup>3</sup> owes to their fascination with chair caning that is oil cloth, a urinal that might really be a fountain, a treacherous pipe, or a spool called Odradek.

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1 Mina Loy, *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, Manchester 1982, 298.

2 Tristan Tzara, from “Dada Manifesto, 1918”, in: *Modernism. An Anthology of Sources and Documents*, eds. Vassiliki Kolocotroni, Jane Goldman, Olga Taxidou, Edinburgh 1998, 276-280, here 276.

3 See for example Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter. A Political Ecology of Things*, Durham and London 2010.

The early 20<sup>th</sup>-century avant-garde adieu to “Mythology and the Mystic Ideal”,<sup>4</sup> proclaimed in various tones, and its concomitant longing to embrace what’s real has extended into post-WWII aesthetic practice and critical debate. Minimal art echoes Tatlin’s constructivism and William Carlos Williams’s catchphrase “no ideas but in things”. The question of how much ‘literalism’ art can bear was posed by Michael Fried in his seminal 1967 essay “Art and Objecthood”. OULIPO may operate in defiance of surrealism but its foregrounding of the materiality of language descends from experiment à la Stein’s. And the field of cultural materialism has picked up where modernist thinkers such as György Lukács and Walter Benjamin left off. The ongoing search for ways to get the very stuff of life into art and writing indicates that real things prove no less slippery than the endless discourse that, in the words of the first self-declared post-modern poet Charles Olson, has “hugely intermit[ted] our participation in our experience, and so prevent[ed] discovery” since the Greeks.<sup>5</sup> Obsessed with the idea of medium, modernist and avant-garde artists and writers wanted the detours of mediation to be kept to a minimum – a goal they either sought to achieve through working with raw or ready-made material or, paradoxically, through elaborate formal experiment. Maybe the 20<sup>th</sup>-century close attention to things should be seen as an attempt to counter the tendency diagnosed by Georg Simmel at the very start of the century: the more things become available, the more people feel alienated from what makes a thing. Or, as Jane Bennett puts it, taking stock of late capitalist consumer culture: “the sheer volume of commodities, and the hyperconsumptive necessity of junking them to make room for new ones, conceals the vitality of matter”.<sup>6</sup>

Just how matter escapes our grasp is shown by Virginia Woolf in her short story “Solid Objects” (1920). It presents us with John, a young man “standing for Parliament upon the brink of a brilliant career”, who finds a lump of glass on the beach. The green thing “pleased him; it puzzled him; it was so hard, so concentrated, so definite an object compared with the vague sea and the hazy shore”. John’s fascination with the piece of broken glass triggers an insatiable hunger for bits and pieces that are in one way or another like it, and from a promising politician he turns into an aloof collector of fragments. Instead of finding out about John’s private hopes and despairs we are confronted with his “determination to

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4 F. T. Marinetti, “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism 1909”, in: *Modernism. An Anthology of Sources and Documents*, eds. Kolocotroni, Goldman, Taxisidou, 250-253, here 251.

5 Charles Olson, “Human Universe”, *Charles Olson. Collected Prose*, eds. Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander, Berkeley 1997, 155-166, here 156.

6 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ontology of Things*, 5.

possess objects”.<sup>7</sup> Woolf, quite surprisingly, displaces the psychological with the materiological.<sup>8</sup> The feat of the story is that it subverts John’s appreciation of the lump of glass as something that is contained. Right from the start John is lost to a web of associations. His habit of looking at the “jewel” on his mantelpiece sets him afloat in a sea of thoughts: “Looked at again and again half consciously by a mind thinking of something else, any object mixes itself so profoundly with the stuff of thought that it loses its actual form and recomposes itself a little differently in an ideal shape which haunts the brain when we least expect it”.<sup>9</sup> In Woolf’s story, ‘solid’ matter and “the stuff of thought” don’t belong to strictly separated realms. They rather constitute a web from which there’s no escaping: things may be acquired but, like thoughts and sensations, they can’t be ‘possessed’.

Things, therefore, shouldn’t be considered as mere objects framed by subjects but, with Spinoza, as having their own power. The question of how we can grasp thingness continues to stir theoretical discussions. These discussions, from Adorno’s negative dialectics intent on discerning the remainder of matter in conceptualization to a vitalist tradition that affirms the continuity between concept and thing, are the background of this book. What it foregrounds is the postcards, clothes, lines of poetry, gramophone discs, limited edition books and magazines, cities, houses, food, bodies, sound and music that, caught up in politics and history, in desire and belief, make up the pulse of modernist and avant-garde experiment.

While there is a clear line from an early 20<sup>th</sup>-century fascination with matter to a neo-avant-garde interest in things, we see two contradictory tendencies in the century’s approaches to medium. Against a modernist program of medium specificity, we have an avant-garde enterprise of intermediality. Stein, for instance, who made it clear that writing was her business, was abhorred when she found out that Picasso had written poetry – and relieved when she had heard him read it out loud, telling him “you are extraordinary within your limits but your limits are extraordinary there”.<sup>10</sup> Pound, granting the arts “some common bond”, held that “certain emotions or subjects find their most appropriate expression in some one particular art”.<sup>11</sup> And writing about modernist painting in 1960 Clement Greenberg considered it clear that “the unique and proper area of competence

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7 Virginia Woolf, “Solid Objects”, *The Mark on the Wall and Other Short Fiction*, Oxford 2008, 54-59, here 55, 56, 58.

8 Bill Brown, “The Secret Life of Things (Virginia Woolf and the Matter of Modernism)”, *Modernism/Modernity*, 6, 1999, n°2, 1-28, here 5.

9 Woolf, “Solid Objects”, 56.

10 Gertrude Stein, *Everybody’s Autobiography*, Cambridge 1993, 38.

11 Ezra Pound, “Vorticism”, <<http://fortnightlyreview.co.uk/vorticism/>>, (12.08.2013), originally published in: *Fortnightly Review*, 1914, n° 96, 461–471.

of each art coincided with all that was unique in the nature of its medium”.<sup>12</sup> Today, by contrast, it isn’t modernism’s purity but the avant-garde’s hybridity that appeals most strongly to us, in our “post medium condition”.<sup>13</sup> New media thinkers defy the medium specificity championed by modernist artists and critics. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, for example, stress that “no medium today, and certainly no single media event, seems to do its cultural work in isolation from other media, any more than it works in isolation from other social and economic forces”.<sup>14</sup> And certainly, as this book’s chapters dealing with the neo-avant-gardes show, intermediality has proven a very productive aesthetic issue. The contrast between a modernist call for specificity and recalcitrant (neo-) avant-garde mixing is not an absolute, however. A Greenbergian formalist stance, shouldn’t prevent us from looking into the ways in which contemporary network approaches to medium have developed out of a cluster of avant-garde and modernist aesthetic experiment.

The relation between aesthetic modernism and new media is significant.<sup>15</sup> The modernist idea that “every medium is a unique art form”<sup>16</sup> obviously didn’t preclude writers and artists from feeling challenged by different media, new and old, or from creating new ones. It isn’t surprising that quite a few of this book’s chapters deal with collage since collage, in inviting us to trace multiple relations between media, can be seen to prefigure the rhizomatic constellations that characterize contemporary conversations on aesthetics and neo-avant-garde practices. The challenge, then, is to “push at the limits of modernism’s concept of the medium from *within* its sometimes tortured logics and contradictory fantasies”.<sup>17</sup> In approaching medium as always impure, as “the site of otherness as such”,<sup>18</sup> we get to see a media ecology that contributes to our understanding of modernist and avant-garde art and writing in terms of matter, and that helps us grasp the relation between the neo-avant-gardes and their predecessors. The chapters to follow

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**12** Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting”, *The Collected Essays and Criticism: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969*, Volume 4, John O’Brien (ed.), Chicago 1993, 85-93, here 86.

**13** Rosalind Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*, New York 2000.

**14** Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, Cambridge, MA 1999, 15.

**15** See for example Michael North, *Camera Works: Photography and the Twentieth-Century Word*, New York, 2005.

**16** Marshall McLuhan, *Essential McLuhan*, Eric McLuhan and Frank Zingrone (eds.), New York 1995, 61.

**17** Mark Goble, *Beautiful Circuits: Modernism and the Mediated Life*, New York and Chichester 2010, 17.

**18** Thierry de Duve, *Clement Greenberg Between the Lines*, trans. Brian Holmes, Paris 1996, 53.

take into account the interactions of writing, photography, film, fashion, music and sound, sculpture, painting, drama, performance, installations, eat art and street art, with each other as well as with technological inventions. The advantage that tracing *what has affected what* holds over teasing out *who used what* is that it makes us see the potential of matter (rather than the genius of artists). This reversal of the order of things comes with an important ethical dimension; it demands we reconsider the subject/object dualism, that we make strange our own position – an avant-garde challenge we’ve still to meet.

## Translations

The above call for an impure materialist approach to modernist and avant-garde experiment – a sea of things, a web of media – owes to Bruno Latour’s understanding of the notion ‘network’. When Latour provocatively claims that we have never been modern, he wants us to pause at modernity’s epistemological project:

The hypothesis of this essay is that the word ‘modern’ designates two sets of entirely different practices which must remain distinct if they are to remain effective, but have recently begun to be confused. The first set of practices, by ‘translation’, creates mixtures between entirely new types of being, hybrids of nature and culture. The second, by ‘purification’, creates two entirely distinct ontological zones: that of human beings on the one hand; that of nonhumans on the other. [...] The first set corresponds to what I have called networks; the second to what I shall call the modern critical stance.<sup>19</sup>

Latour invites us to consider *both* the complex processes of translation that configure networks and the critical project intent on purification that creates the familiar set of dualisms opposing nature to culture and nonhumans to humans. Such a double vantage not only makes it possible to think of things as both “hard” as well as intangible but also combine a concern for medium specificity with an attention to hybridity. It furthermore makes us reconsider who/what are the ‘actors’ in the vast and intricate networks of modernism and the avant-gardes. The consequences of such an approach are far-reaching, not only for our take on modern art and writing, but also in terms of ethics. The “monsters” need to be given an official existence, democracy may need to be extended to things.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Cambridge, MA 1993, 10-11.

<sup>20</sup> Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 10. See also Jean Baudrillard: “We will not oppose the beautiful to the ugly, but will look for the uglier than ugly: the monstrous” (*Fatal Strategies*, New York 1990, 7).

Jessica Sjöholm Skrubbe explicitly takes up Latour's invitation. Elegantly, she argues that the "monsters" that are the picture postcards from The Sturm Gallery and Walden Collection can't be considered as merely reflecting the art works they reproduce, but need to be seen as enacting variously formatted modernisms. Magali Nachtergaele reveals the complex intersecting of various collage traditions for André Breton's understanding of the surrealist image. Breton's network, she shows, doesn't only comprise the usual suspects but also things and media: photomontages, photograms, films and cinema novels. Where Nachtergaele has Breton confound our reading/viewing habits, Jed Rasula makes us pause at the fascinating early 1920s experiments with visual music. By zooming in on the *clavilux*, a device that made it possible to project color in motion and experience, in silence, what music may look like, he addresses pertinent questions concerning the relationship between music, abstract painting and cinema. A key moment in the story of visualising time that Rasula tells is Viking Eggeling's and Hans Richter's realization that the painted scrolls they were experimenting with would have to give way to film. Lidia Gluchowska returns our gaze to the canvas when she traces the influence of Eggeling's abstract films on the work of the Polish-Jewish painter, graphic designer and art critic Henryk Berlewi. In considering Berlewi, translation is important not only in terms of intermediality. The fact that some of Berlewi's key texts, written in Yiddish, remain untranslated demonstrates that the connections that make a network are never a matter of aesthetics alone but involve institutions and politics.

That the language of the avant-garde, and of its field of studies, is charged with politics is also what the following two chapters highlight. Emma West points to the lack of scholarly attention hitherto devoted to avant-garde fashion. She shows how futurist and constructivist design and rhetoric intersect, and explains the failure of these projected fashion revolutions by the resistance of everyday life to design. Claire Warden takes issue with the reception of W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood's *On the Frontier* and Stephen Spender's *Trial of a Judge*. The label 'poetic drama' too often causes readers to sidestep the performative aspects of these 1938 pieces – aspects we have to take into account if we want their anti-fascist message to fully materialize. The section closes with Vladimir Feshchenko's chapter on Kandinsky's bitextuality. In echo of what Latour has called a "mediator" – "an original event [that] creates what it translates"<sup>21</sup> – Feshchenko considers Kandinsky's quest for the language of art as a process in which verbal and visual content reciprocally recode and transmute.

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<sup>21</sup> Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 78.

## Memory

Latour's idea of 'network' doesn't only come with a spatial configuration that jogs us out of critical habits and has us trace lines of translation between various non/human actors. It also bears on our understanding of time. Latour asks us to work with continuity rather than rupture. Generalizing, his claim that 'we have never been modern' implies that there are no clean slates in history, that the proclaimed new beginnings in politics, science and art weren't isolated and singular new events. Although such a denial of the new sounds very much out of tune with the spirit of the avant-garde, Latour's intention isn't to prove that all those championing modernity, in one version or another, got it wrong. That, ironically, would be a very modern project:

[b]y proposing to debunk their illusions, to uncover their real practice, to probe their unconscious belief, to reveal their double talk, I would play a very modern role indeed, taking my turn in a long queue of debunkers and critics. But the relation between the work of purification and that of mediation is not that of conscious and unconscious, formal and informal, language and practice, illusion and reality.

If a Latourian reading of modernism and the avant-gardes isn't about approaching the call to 'make it new' as the false slogan for an essentially tradition-struck bunch of artists and writers, then what is it about? In analogy to the double work of purification and hybridization that comes with the idea of the network, it asks us to consider the idea of novelty in relation to the ongoing work of tradition and memory – "Ariadne's thread".<sup>22</sup> Like the idea of modernity, then, the 'make it new' phrase needs to be seen as a "force added to others that [...] it had the power to represent, to accelerate, or to summarize" rather than an all-encompassing truth.<sup>23</sup> Modernist and avant-garde creators used the idea of novelty (and of autonomy, of formalism, ...) to understand what they and the people around them were doing. In reading the pure visions of the new in dialogue with those practices mediating between old and new, this book is in line with the surge of historicized readings that have invigorated modernism and avant-garde studies since the 1990s.

The section begins with Andrea Sakoparnig's appeal to reconsider the opposition between form and matter that characterizes 20<sup>th</sup>-century aesthetics. She takes us back to Hegel's revaluation of matter and, via Adorno's politics of form, drafts the contours of a contemporary aesthetics of matter. Where Sakoparnig points to the pertinence of (Hegelian) dialectics in thinking about avant-garde matter, Eleni Loukopoulou makes us hear echoes of Vico's *Scienza Nuova* (1725)

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<sup>22</sup> Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 3.

<sup>23</sup> Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 40.

in James Joyce's *Anna Livia Plurabelle*. She traces the history of the (recorded) text in two directions: back to Vico's theory of history and into Joyce's contemporary network in which the *Anna Livia Plurabelle* gramophone disc came about. Next, Lisa Otty and Tabea Schindler delve into the 'old' practices of making books and working with plaster respectively. Otty shows that the charms of the new media and technological inventions hardly stopped the modernists from investing in printing, typography and book design. She maps the ways in which modernist small presses both engage with the 19<sup>th</sup>-century arts and crafts tradition and interpolate avant-garde ideas and strategies. Schindler concentrates on the anachronisms inherent to plaster. Setting out from the work of Auguste Rodin and George Segal she outlines the ways in which plaster, through the many references it carries, makes memory speak.

How we can tally the idea of the avant-garde with that of tradition is the question the two following chapters pose. They shift perspective and consider relationships between the historical avant-gardes and neo-avant-garde experiment. In calling for an open tradition they expose the pitfall in working with the idea of continuity: the danger of it blotting out difference. Tomaž Toporišič deals with the response by Slovenian *retro-garda* theatre to its historical predecessors. In the post-avant-garde's very deconstructions of the historical avant-garde, he traces a commitment to a vanguard utopianism that makes the work resound with the avant-garde it wanted to distance itself from. Camilla Skovbjerg Paldam calls for the relevance of surrealist collage practice. She investigates three current tendencies in contemporary art that operate in dialogue with the artistic strategy of collage – a challenge that demands far-reaching inquiry into what artistic media are capable of.

## Spaces and Places

Matter on the move travels to unforeseen places. It affects the spaces and places it stops in and is changed by them. One way to picture these translation processes that dynamize modernist and (neo-)avant-garde networks is by thinking of "radical vectors" shaking things up, affecting art and society 'at the roots'. In epidemiology, Mike Sell explains, "vector" refers to "disease agents that don't *cause* but *spread* diseases".<sup>24</sup> The trajectories of these vectors are impossible to predict and therefore hard to control. The fleas that, living on rats, spread the bubonic plague in the 1300s, for example, moved in many different directions and at dif-

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<sup>24</sup> Mike Sell (ed.), *Avant-Garde Performance and Material Exchange: Vectors of the Radical*, Basingstoke 2011, 12.

ferent speeds. Although modernist and avant-garde practices have repeatedly been associated with disease and degeneration – to be put a stop to so as to keep order from collapsing – the vectors we follow in this section don't pose a major threat to global health. In their complexity and scope of travel media, however, they easily outstrip any vermin. We want to find out not only how modernist and (neo-)avant-garde matter has travelled but also how, in material exchange and translation, the materiological project of the avant-garde has spread.

Lori Cole examines the ways in which *Camera Work* and *Revista de Avance* disseminated art across national borders. In exploring the art communities represented in these modernist magazines, she shows how the Americas formulated a response to Europe's dominant cultural position in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Gregor Langfeld's chapter concentrates on the translations a European cultural product undergoes once it crosses the Atlantic. Langfeld oversees the canonization process of German expressionism in the USA and investigates the fundamental changes this implied to what expressionism meant. Gunilla Hermansson, too, takes into account expressionism but she problematizes the scheme in which translation takes place between clear cultural scenes. The constellation of ideas and prose writings interacting with 'expressionism' in the Nordic countries that she studies invites us to reconsider our approach to avant-garde categorizations. The work of neo-avant-garde artist Paul Neagu, discussed by Ileana Pintilie, is another example of the ways in which complex cultural geographies inform artistic practice. Neagu's work, which combines his Romanian background with an intervention in the British artistic scene he worked in, has come to stand for European cultural synthesis. From cross-Atlantic and trans-European cartographies we move into smaller surroundings. Clément Dessy argues that an exploration of an artist's material can't exclude the studio in which he or she worked and takes us on a tour of the (destroyed) house of the Belgian artist Fernand Khnopff, which some considered a "temple of the Self". Eveline Kilian's reading of Ford Madox Ford's *The Soul of London: A Survey of a Modern City* (1905) and Virginia Woolf's London essays prepares for the section "Bodies and Sensoria", as she traces the ways in which material spaces are formed by and form individual bodies.

## Bodies and Sensoria

If matter, in modernism and the avant-garde, becomes more important than the individual's well and woe, then what are the consequences for the individual's body? A turn to the body sounds hardly revolutionary given the fact that the body is a key player in 19<sup>th</sup>-century realism: portrait painters give us adorned, wistful, conditioned,

political bodies, and the tragedy of an Emma Bovary or Anna Karenina is that they should have bodies to be whisked away. Modernist and (neo-)avant-garde bodies differ from the carefully positioned realist bodies, however, in that it's no longer clear who owns them and what delineates them. Instead of addressing the issue of what bodies are allowed to do, vanguard artists and writers probe what bodies are capable of. From emotions, and its range of bodily expressions, they shift to affect.

With respect to the body, Latour's network of intersecting human and non-human actors finds its correlative in Gilles Deleuze's Spinozist approach to corporeality. In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari redefine the body. No longer determined by a form, a substance (cogito or hierarchy of organs), or a particular function, a body "*is defined only by a longitude and a latitude: [...] the sum total of the material elements belonging to it under given relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness (longitude); the sum total of the intensive affects it is capable of at a given power or degree of potential (latitude). Nothing but affects and local movements, differential speeds*".<sup>25</sup> Deleuze and Guattari advocate the de- and re-organization of the body, which implies we work to delete the body's inscribed functions and meanings and discover its vitalist potential in relation to its material surroundings. That Deleuze's understanding of such a decoded body, a Body without Organs, was inspired by Antonin Artaud's *To Have Done with the Judgment of God* (1947) is well-known and it's hardly a coincidence that he taps the avant-gardes for examples. As the chapters in this section make clear, the (neo-)avant-garde has set in motion an exploration of the body and sensorial experience that today, whether we think of ourselves of cyborgs or take stock of the increasing pressure in society to 'manage' our bodies, only increases in relevance.

For Jim Drobnick, Christiane Heibach and Pavlos Antoniadis a new approach to the body demands a reconsideration of the hierarchy of the senses. They take issue with the long western tradition of ocularcentrism, according to which vision is the highest of the senses, most closely related to intelligence. Intelligence, here, means the ability to distance and differentiate – visual operations that facilitate analysis. Heibach, in focusing on the sense of taste and the issues broached in eat art, argues that the epistemological model of synthesis that comes with the 'low' sense of taste and smell is a powerful alternative for the traditional ocularcentric analytical models. Drobnick zooms in on Marcel Duchamp's fascination with olfaction. Never an "olfactory artist" – a term he reserved for painters whose 'addiction' to turpentine blinded them to the new media challenges of the era – Duchamp tried to translate the opportunities to mix media that so excited him into the experience of feeling breathing. Antoniadis problematizes the link

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25 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia: A Thousand Plateaus*, Minneapolis 1987, 260.

between visibility and musical corporeality that steers contemporary performance and intermediality-oriented (debate on) music and that leaves little space for absolute music. With reference to Brian Ferneyhough's project he explores the notion of a music-specific corporeality that transcends visibility. Gaëlle Théval concentrates on the corporeality in experimental poetry. The body she encounters in Julien Blaine's project of "elementary poetry" contrasts boldly with the corporeal energy that Antoniadis finds in Ferneyhough. For Blaine, the body, prime element in his poetry, is flesh, blood and bone. The section's chapter on Lygia Clark addresses the question that is implicit in the other corporeal readings: how much room is there for subjectivity in an expanding understanding of corporeality? In anticipation of the book's final section, Susan Best argues that Clark's work, with its faith in the transformative power of the body, makes visible the processes of subject-formation and thus relates embodiment to empowerment.

## Subjectivities

Although 'network' or 'Body without Organs' are hardly Freudian terms, it is Freud who asked the modernists to think of selves as structured rhizomatically. Together with the other pioneers of psychology, he concentrated on the hordes of connected thoughts and impulses – some of which "monstrous" – that make up subjects, instead of on balanced cogitos. Freud's "Interpretation of Dreams" (1900) invites us to discover a web of intersecting thoughts within ourselves. This thought-web, made up of "dream thoughts", counts as the "new class of psychical material" he had discovered. The process of discovering this maze of underground thoughts, importantly, takes continuous effort, and problematizes, if not debunks, the idea of completion. Where a dream's actual content may be summed up in half a page, Freud writes,

[t]he analysis setting out the dream-thoughts underlying it may occupy six, eight or a dozen times as much space. [...] As a rule one underestimates the amount of compression that has taken place, since one is inclined to regard the dream-thoughts that have been brought to light as the complete material, whereas if the work of interpretation is carried further it may reveal still more thoughts concealed behind the dream.<sup>26</sup>

Prompted by Freud, the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a revolution in thinking about the subject – both in terms of what constitutes subjectivity and of who can lay

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<sup>26</sup> Sigmund Freud, "From *The Interpretation of Dreams*", in: *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*, eds. Vassiliki Kolocotroni, Jane Goldman, Olga Taxidou, 47-51, here 49, 50.

claim on the label subject. Although psychoanalysis has been heavily criticized, the projects of working with that most slippery of materials – thoughts and dreams, memories and desires – and of exploring subject positions have held great appeal. From those enterprises delving into the most personal depths of the self to those that, in echo of Deleuze’s criticism on Freud that “he mistook crowds for a single person”,<sup>27</sup> investigate the many voices buzzing in one mind, the question of “mental material” and its politics, the chapters in this section show, has engrossed modernism and the (neo-)avant-gardes.

Agata Jakubowska concentrates on parental subjects in the neo-avant-garde work of Günter Brus and the duo KwieKulik, who used their children as artistic material. The artists’ contexts are important – Freudian psychoanalysis, notably, was all but absent in KwieKulik’s post-WWII Poland – but the force of the work, Jakubowska argues, is that it is personal as well as political. Next, Hélène Thiérard outlines the autobiographical project *Hylé* of Raoul Hausmann. While the narrative form of *Hylé* seems to contradict his post-dadaist, presentist program, Thiérard shows *Hylé I* to continue an engagement with the sensory now through its intricate mosaic structure and the practice of “auto-collage”. Cosana Eram, too, tells the story of a private book: Georges Hugnet’s book of erotic collages, *La Vie amoureuse des Spumifères*. Although the photographs of vintage nude postcards, with added gouaches of monstrous creatures and an accompanying text echo typical surrealist approaches to femininity, the book ultimately defies categorization. The next two chapters move away from private life and into the post- and pre-personal. Both Sami Sjöberg and Ariane Mildenberg deal with artists seeking to make material those parts of subjective experience that are to be situated on the threshold of the phenomenal. Sjöberg looks at the lettrist project of the Romanian Jewish Isidore Isou and outlines the ways in which his hypergraphics incorporates a messianic temporality, thus charging outspoken material poetry with the possibility of transhistorical redemption. Mildenberg foregrounds Gertrude Stein and, from a phenomenological vantage, argues that Stein’s portraits get across the way in which language is grounded in the pre-predicative experience of an embodied consciousness. Tania Ørum’s reading of Scandinavian feminist art of the 1960s and 1970s, made under the banner of “the personal is the political”, makes us see that these artists’ experiments with everyday or ‘personal’ materials should be seen in line with the conceptual art of the 1960s rather than as a reaction against the avant-garde. Claire Leydenbach, finally, reviews the surrealist struggle with the subjective in automatic writing. If, after Freud, subjects are no longer in charge of matter, but part of it, with their very thoughts considered “mental material”, then what can expression amount to?

SP, with SB and AR

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<sup>27</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 30.

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## Translations



Jessica Sjöholm Skrubbe  
**Modernism Diffracted**

Picture Postcards from The Sturm Gallery and Walden  
Collection in Berlin

In a world of objects and egotism, Expressionism sought spirit, depth and community. [...] But the unity of such a 'spiritual' style was achieved through the agency of dealers, newspapers and magazines. One of the most violently anti-bourgeois and anti-materialist art movements of the early twentieth century owed its success to the market conditions that its artists openly reviled. Thus it is important to stress that Expressionism was not a creation of the artists but of the dealers and critics who promoted them. The most significant of these figures was the Berlin writer, editor and dealer, Herwarth Walden.<sup>1</sup>

Shearer West's opening observation reminds us that diverse practices of establishing relations, including technologies of reproduction, distribution and communication were imperative for the avant-garde movements of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Implicitly, her remark opens up for a discussion on modernist aesthetics as a broader process of discursive and material relations. Indeed, it also draws attention to the aesthetics of matter of an art critic and dealer such as Herwarth Walden, founder of the art magazine *Der Sturm* (1910-32) and its adherent publishing house and gallery.<sup>2</sup> The manifold strategies Herwarth Walden employed in order to promote artists of the international modernist and avant-garde movements included the production of picture postcards that reproduced artworks by artists affiliated with Sturm. This chapter discusses the picture postcards produced by Sturm as *material translations* of artworks and examines their discursive and material meanings in relation to the creation and promotion of modernist art within the Sturm enterprise and beyond.

The visual and material translation of artworks – many of which were painted in bright colours on canvases – into black and white pictures of an often strikingly smaller size, did not merely multiply singular originals into manifold copies. Discussing the reproduction of artworks in terms of *translation* rather than *dissemination* is a way of drawing attention to *reciprocal processes* within the visual and

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1 Shearer West, *The Visual Arts in Germany 1890-1937. Utopia and Despair*, Manchester 2000, 84.

2 The first issue of *Der Sturm* was published in 1910. For comprehensive descriptions of the wide range of Sturm activities – magazine, gallery, travelling exhibitions, publishing house, *Kunstbende*, art school, theatre etc. – see Georg Brühl, *Herwarth Walden und "Der Sturm"*, Köln 1983, and Volker Pirsisch, *Der Sturm. Eine Monographie*, Herzberg 1985. In the following, "Sturm" refers to this broader enterprise of Sturm, "*Der Sturm*" refers to the magazine only.

material culture that constituted and circulated the pictorial language of modernism. The concept of translation employed here refers to a procedure that performs diversity rather than (re)presents similarity. The point of departure for the following discussion is the insight from actor-network theory that “the movement of adoption is a movement of adaption”.<sup>3</sup> Hence, the discursive and material *relation* between artworks and postcards as well as their interdependence and reciprocal definitions within Sturm will be the centre of attention.<sup>4</sup>

## **Sturm’s *Künstlerpostkarten***

From the 1880s onwards photographic postcards were produced in large numbers and collected and distributed in a similar manner as the *cartes-de-visite* – calling cards which featured portrait photographs and other images – in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup> Pictorial postcards achieved an enormous popularity and the practices of collecting mass-reproduced images grew into a popular obsession. By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the *cartomania* had been replaced by a *postcard craze*.<sup>6</sup>

From its foundation in 1912, Herwarth Walden’s Sturm gallery in Berlin had marketed picture-postcards, *Künstlerpostkarten*, reproducing artworks by the artists displayed in and promoted by the gallery. In Sturm, *Künstlerpostkarten* referred to picture-postcards that reproduced artworks by Sturm artists. However, the notion of *Künstlerpostkarten* eventually became reserved for an exclusive range of objects, namely picture-postcards denominated as “original” and/or “authorized” by an artist.<sup>7</sup> Mass-produced objects like the Sturm postcards have

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3 Madeleine Akrich, Michel Callon and Bruno Latour, “The Key to Success in Innovation Part II”, in: *International Journal of Innovation Management*, 6, 2002, n° 2, 208-209.

4 This line of thought is in line with Donna Haraway’s argument that the “relationships are the smallest possible patterns of analysis” (Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*, Minneapolis 2008, 25-26). Actor-network theory (ANT) has established the importance of reciprocal definitions and relational processes since the 1980s, see for example Michel Callon’s seminal essay “The Sociology of an Actor-Network: The Case of the Electric Vehicle”, in: *Mapping the Dynamics of Science and Technology: Sociology of Science in the Real World*, eds. Michel Callon, John Law and Arie Rip, London 1986, 19-34.

5 Mary Warner Marien, *Photography. A Cultural History*, London 2002, 170 ff.

6 In fact, the picture postcard was one of the factors that contributed to the decline of the *carte-de-visite* (William C. Darrah, *Cartes de Visite in Nineteenth Century Photography*, Gettysburg, PA 1981, 10).

7 Bärbel Hedinger, “Künstler, Post, Karte – eine Einleitung”, in: *Die Künstlerpostkarte. Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Bärbel Hedinger, München 1992, 226, note 3. On “proper” Künst-

been disqualified as they translated original artworks into commonplace objects of everyday life, a process of translation that turned the singular fetish into multiple commodities. Arguably, this categorization misrecognizes the meaning of the material translation that was spurred by contemporary technologies of communication and distribution.

The first series of *Sturm-Künstlerpostkarten* was *Gemälde der Futuristen* (Futurist Paintings). The postcards were put on sale for 20 Pfennig apiece in September 1912, following an exhibition at the emerging Sturm gallery in April that same year with the Italian futurists Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo and Gino Severini. *Gemälde der Futuristen* reproduced artworks shown in the exhibition including Russolo's *Train at Full Speed* and Severini's *The Milliner*.<sup>8</sup> Accompanying each reproduced image on the other side of the card was a short text identical with the captions published in the exhibition catalogue. The description of *The Milliner* was: "An arabesque of the movement produced by the twinkling colours and iridescence of the frills and furbelows on show: the electric light divides the scene into defined zones. A study of simultaneous penetration".<sup>9</sup> Another series of Sturm postcards followed the "Erster Deutscher Herbstsalon", the seminal exhibition of mainly European modernist art organised by Sturm and opened in September 1913. The illustrated exhibition catalogue contained 366 works of art.<sup>10</sup> Several artworks were both printed in the catalogue and reproduced as postcards, including Natalia Goncharova's *Landscape* and Gabriele Münter's *Black Mask with Roses*.

Generally, Sturm's postcard production followed the exhibition practices of the gallery and not all postcards were produced as part of a series. In 1917, two new editions of Sturm postcards with a slightly different character were announced.<sup>11</sup> One reproduced portrait photographs of Sturm artists. This *Sturm-Künstler* series comprised portraits of eleven Sturm artists and writers such as August Stramm, Jacoba van Heemskerck, Wassily Kandinsky, Oskar Kokoschka and Paul Klee. The

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lerpostkarten by Sturm artists, see for instance Peter-Klaus Schuster, "Nachricht von den Tieren. Zu den Postkarten von Franz Marc", in: *Die Künstlerpostkarte*, ed. Hedinger, 19-23; Gerhard Wietek, *Gemalte Künstlerpost. Karten und Briefe deutscher Künstler aus dem 20. Jahrhundert*, München 1977.

<sup>8</sup> Compare the advertisement in *Der Sturm*, 1912, n° 127/128. Reproductions of the postcards are at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Nachlass Nell Walden, Handschrift 125. There was an announcement of the postcards (and of *Sonderdrucke*, special editions) on the inside back cover of the exhibition catalogue (Herwarth Walden (ed.), *Die Futuristen. Umberto Boccioni, Carlo D. Carrà, Luigi Russolo, Gino Severini*, Berlin 1912).

<sup>9</sup> Walden (ed.), *Die Futuristen*, 22, my translation.

<sup>10</sup> Herwarth Walden (ed.), *Erster Deutscher Herbstsalon*, Berlin 1913.

<sup>11</sup> Both series were announced in *Der Sturm*, 8, 1917, n° 1, 15-16.

series was expanded and altered over the following years. In 1920 the number of portraits had doubled.<sup>12</sup> The production of such an edition related to popular practices of collecting *cartes-de-visites* and picture postcards, not least to their function as social self-promotion. Pictures in the Sturm archive in Berlin exemplify these common practices of exchanging picture cards within the Sturm circle. In 1916, following the exhibition “Schwedische Expressionisten” in the Sturm gallery, Isaac Grünewald sent two portrait photographs with his dedication to Herwarth and Nell Walden respectively.<sup>13</sup>

The other series introduced in 1917, *Sammlung Walden*, reproduced 24 artworks from Nell Walden’s collection of Sturm art.<sup>14</sup> Nell Walden, b. Roslund, was Herwarth Walden’s closest collaborator and wife. She trained as an artist in the Sturm art school and was one of the first major collectors of Sturm art.<sup>15</sup> The images reproduced included Marc Chagall’s *I and the Village*, Franz Marc’s *The Yellow Cow*, Jacoba van Heemskerck’s *Drawing LV* and Wassily Kandinsky’s *Drawing*.<sup>16</sup> Eventually, the series was enlarged with a picture-postcard showing a photograph of Herwarth and Nell Walden in the dining room of their private apartment located at the same address as the gallery, Potsdamerstrasse 134a in the western part of Berlin. The new postcard series clearly had been part of an extension of the Sturm enterprise. In 1917, the gallery business expanded and reopened in larger rooms. In addition, the opening of a Sturm bookshop confirmed the commercial aspect of Sturm’s development.

## Marketing Modernism

Judging from Herwarth Walden’s alleged talent for propaganda, the postcards were intended as commercial advertising for the modernist artists represented

<sup>12</sup> See announcement in *Der Sturm*, 10, 1920, n° 12, 175.

<sup>13</sup> Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Handschrift 125, “STURM”-Künstler: Postkarten, Photos u.a. The exhibition displayed 41 works by Swedish artists Gösta Adrian-Nilsson, Isaac Grünewald, Edward Hald, Sigrid Hjertén and Einar Jolin. See further, Jan Torsten Ahlstrand, *et al.* (eds), *Schwedische Avantgarde und Der Sturm in Berlin*, Osnabrück and Lund 2000.

<sup>14</sup> For a brief description of Nell Walden’s art collection, see Karla Bilang, “Nell Walden”, in: *Sammeln nur um zu besitzen? Berühmte Kunstsammlerinnen von Isabella d’Este bis Peggy Guggenheim*, ed. Britta Jürs, Berlin 2000, 229-255.

<sup>15</sup> Herwarth and Nell Walden’s partnership within the Sturm enterprise, is discussed in more length in Jessica Sjöholm Skrubbe, *Collaborations. Herwarth and Nell Walden’s Sturm* (forthcoming).

<sup>16</sup> A set of the series is at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Nachlass Nell Walden, Handschrift 124.

by Sturm. Indeed, the decision to produce several Sturm postcard series was a promotion strategy very much in accordance with contemporary marketing practices. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, postcards were used as an advertising medium on a large scale by all types of businesses.<sup>17</sup> Hence, picture postcards produced by Sturm were part of a popular visual and material culture, employed for both social self-promotion and commercial advertising in the middle class. Sturm's diverse forms of visual and verbal propaganda for modernist art – the distribution of *Der Sturm*, books, postcards, art prints, flyers, posters and other products – all point to a skilful adaptation of practices in mass media and popular commodity culture. Most probably, this material process of translation and circulation of a modernist pictorial language contributed to the popularization of Sturm art and artists.

At the outset, *Der Sturm* appeared weekly with an alleged edition of 30,000 copies – most certainly a gross exaggeration – and at a low price, 10 Pfennig, in order to appeal to a large public.<sup>18</sup> In addition, *Der Sturm* was illustrated and printed in the large format of a daily newspaper, which distinguished it from comparable magazines, notably those edited by Herwarth Walden before 1910. The advertisements on the inside of the back cover of *Der Sturm* reinforced the formal similarities to contemporary daily newspapers.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the concept and format of *Der Sturm* was in itself a statement that situated the magazine between mass and elite culture.

Hence, even if *Der Sturm* published fierce criticism and polemical attacks against popular and commercial culture, the operations of the Sturm enterprise itself never were restricted to the art field in a narrow sense.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the translation from modernist artworks to Sturm postcards materialized an intimate con-

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17 David M. Williams, "A New Medium for Advertising: The Postcard, 1900-1920", in: *European Journal of Marketing* 22, 1993, n° 8, 17-34.

18 Lilian Schacherl, *Die Zeitschriften des Expressionismus. Versuch einer zeitungswissenschaftlichen Strukturanalyse*, PhD dissertation, München 1957, 23. The first number of *Der Sturm* in 1910 states an edition of 30,000 on the front page. See also Brühl, *Herwarth Walden*, 210.

19 Until September 1912 *Der Sturm* published a diverse range of advertisements, thereafter only "Anzeigen tatsächlichen Inhalts", which comprised mainly information on Sturm's activities and products (prints, postcards, books). See also Helen Boorman, *Herwarth Walden and Der Sturm 1910-1930: German Culture Idealism and the Commercialization of Art*, PhD dissertation, University of East Anglia 1987, 219, note 35.

20 In his account on Sturm and the press, Volker Pirsisch mainly repeats Sturm's rhetorical arguments and hence confirms Sturm's self-image (Pirsisch, *Der Sturm*, 605-617). Helen Boorman has a more nuanced approach and discusses Herwarth Walden's and Sturm's ambivalent position between avant-garde art and commercial culture. She emphasizes "his own active involvement in the late Wilhemine culture industry" (Boorman, *Herwarth Walden and Der Sturm*, 183-223, quotation from 183).

nection between modernist aesthetics, the art market and the commercial culture industry. Importantly, the transformation process brought with it changes in both directions. Due to their function as advertisements, reproductions of artworks on postcards did not only represent a certain pictorial language but referred back to the materiality of the works of art and reminded people of their status as commodities in a steadily growing transnational art market.

## Materializing Transnational Networks

The postcard series of Sturm, as well as programmatic books, prints and texts in *Der Sturm*, regular exhibitions in the Berlin gallery and a wide scope of travelling exhibitions in Germany and abroad, demonstrations of Nell Walden's collection of Sturm art, talks and lectures et cetera, all contributed in different ways to Herwarth Walden's "Expressionist megalomania".<sup>21</sup> To put it in a more sympathetic way, Herwarth Walden's clever adaptation of a wide range of strategies and technologies for mediating and promoting art and artists represented by Sturm highlights his success in establishing himself as the obligatory point of passage in a transnational network of material and discursive relations, which displayed, promoted and circulated modernist art in Berlin and beyond.<sup>22</sup>

Not least the extensive travelling across the European continent by Herwarth and Nell Walden which preceded Sturm's organisation of "Erster Deutscher Herbstsalon" indicate the importance of a transnational art community and market.<sup>23</sup> In her diary of 1913, Nell Walden made notes on these travels. The rapid transportation between European art centres stretching from Paris to Vienna and from Munich to Copenhagen illustrates a modern time-space compression crucial for Sturm's international pretensions. The texts on the postcard series *Erster Deutscher Herbstsalon* were in German, indicating that the cards were intended for a German-speaking market only or possibly including the educated middle

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<sup>21</sup> West, *The Visual Arts in Germany*, 89.

<sup>22</sup> On the constitution of obligatory points of passage as a way of securing power and making an actor in a network indispensable, see Callon, "The Sociology of an Actor-Network", 25 ff.

<sup>23</sup> Besides the dominance of Impressionism on the Berlin art market at the time, another reason for Herwarth Walden's operations in the national and transnational art market might have been his polemics in *Der Sturm* which "kept him in a position of embattled isolation, without the network of contacts necessary to gain a foothold in the mainstream art market". Robin Lenman, "The Internationalisation of the Berlin Art Market 1910-1920 and the Role of Herwarth Walden", in: *Künstlerischer Austausch. Akten des XXVIII. Internationalen Kongresses für Kunstgeschichte, Berlin, 15-20 Juli 1992, Band III*, ed. Thomas W. Gaehtgens, Berlin 1993, 538.

class beyond central Europe. The texts in the exhibition catalogue, though, were translated into English and Danish as well.

Obviously, the Sturm enterprise benefitted immensely from the technologies and developments – for example, transportation infrastructure, rapid urbanization, postal service, and diverse print technologies – that made this material translocation possible but also effected and enabled new ways of communication on art within the art world and beyond. However, any discursive and/or material alteration of communication inevitably changes the relation of those communicating.<sup>24</sup> In this context, it is worth emphasizing that picture postcards were intimately connected to an individual and sometimes ritualized usage of material popular culture that exceeded the habitual behaviour of encountering artworks in a gallery room or in a private collection.

## Experiences Extended and Displaced

Postcards were part of modern tourism. Travel journals used them as illustrations and hotels employed them for advertising.<sup>25</sup> As tokens of tourism, they illuminated Walter Benjamin's suggestion that the souvenir in modern society was "the relic secularized".<sup>26</sup> This had bearing on the picture postcards of Sturm as well. Not only the exhibition catalogues but also the postcards metaphorically allowed the visitors to the Sturm gallery to take along a part of the event. As tokens from a specific occasion, postcards and catalogues offered a material ground for the memories of experience of the artworks. The postcards – and particularly those assembled into series such as *Gemälde der Futuristen*, *Erster Deutscher Herbstsalon* and *Sammlung Walden* – documented and materialized a temporary visual context that would travel through time and space and thus offer a point of access to the event even to those who did not in fact see the exhibitions or the display of Nell Walden's collection. Again, the postcards' material meaning as documents, and possibly also as souvenirs or relics in a transferred sense of the word, extended and displaced the experience of encountering modernist aesthetics in time and place.

Sturm's activities also expanded into the city and became part of the urban fabric. According to Nell Walden, posters that announced the futurist show in

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<sup>24</sup> See Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 26-27.

<sup>25</sup> Edward Heron-Allen, "First picture postcard", in: *Notes and Queries*, 2 October 1926, n° 151, 248.

<sup>26</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Central Park", trans. Lloyd Spencer and Mark Harrington, in: *New German Critique*, Winter 1985, n° 34, 48.

1912 were stuck on advertising pillars every night during the exhibition.<sup>27</sup> The futurists returned to Berlin to attend the opening of the “Erster Deutscher Herbstsalon” where they exhibited 12 works. On this occasion, the “Futurist Manifesto”, which had been published in *Der Sturm* in connection with their first exhibition in the Sturm gallery, was distributed to the public at Potsdamer Platz.<sup>28</sup> The futurist artists thus extended the exhibition as event into urban space in a manner that must have appealed to Herwarth Walden. Indeed, when “Erster Deutscher Herbstsalon” was condemned by art critics, part of Walden’s counterattack was to distribute a flyer, “Aufruf gegen Kunstkritiker”, in the public space.<sup>29</sup>

Reports from visits to the Sturm gallery and/or the Walden private collection are scarce and there is little knowledge of the habitual social behaviour of beholding Sturm art.<sup>30</sup> Among the few documented visits to the gallery are the accounts of Swedish journalist Ellen Rydelius and her husband, the author Harald Wägner. The former’s account of a visit to the Sturm gallery in spring 1918 – probably during the Nell Walden exhibition in May, as Harald Wägner reported from this exhibition to a Swedish newspaper in 1918 – indicates the diversity of visual impressions in the Sturm headquarters. Rydelius not only studied the artworks on show in the gallery and in the private collection, but also noticed the social and visual front of the Walden couple in terms that were more general.<sup>31</sup> She thus described an embodied reception of artworks situated and enacted in a discursive, social and material context, which also included the Walden couple’s postures, social rituals and sartorial signs. Nell Walden’s fashionable accessories, Herwarth Walden’s dedicated piano performance and the modernist artworks packed together at the walls were simultaneously observed and later described in the same tone.

If the reception of modernist art in the gallery and in the private collection was part of a social enactment, the postcards made possible an encounter with

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27 Nell Walden, *Der Sturm: ein Erinnerungsbuch an Herwarth Walden und die Künstler aus dem Sturmkreis*, eds. Nell Walden and Lothar Schreyer, Baden-Baden 1954, 27.

28 Ursula Prinz, “Futuristen in Berlin”, in: *Die Sprachen des Futurismus: Literatur, Malerei, Skulptur, Musik, Theater, Fotografie*, Berlin 2009, 47.

29 See *Der Sturm*, 19, 1928, 7, 3 and Peter Sprengel, *Literatur im Kaiserreich. Studien zur Moderne*, Berlin 1993, 169-170.

30 The social constitution of the public visiting Sturm is better documented through Nell Walden’s guest books. Every visit to the gallery was not recorded, but the list gives a fair picture of the public visiting the openings. Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Nachlass Nell Walden.

31 Ellen Rydelius, *Leva randigt*, Stockholm 1951, 116-118. On social fronts and performances in human interaction, see Erwing Goffmann, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Stockholm 1951.

the pictorial language of modernism that was personal and tactile in character. More importantly, it made possible a reception of inherent volatility. Principally, reproductions of artworks promoted by Sturm could turn up everywhere. Put differently, the size and materiality of the postcard opened up for a more intimate, but also more mundane bodily experience of the pictorial language of the art object through its reproduction.

## Images and Texts

The Sturm postcards did not only represent modernist art, but offered interpretative frameworks too, established through short texts on the back of the card. These captions stated the artist's name and the title of the work, but usually subordinated this information under the primary heading of Sturm and Herwarth Walden.<sup>32</sup> The principal function of this kind of text was to anchor the denotations and connotations of the image and thus to direct the interpretation and understanding of the card towards meanings chosen in advance. In short, it caused the beholder to receive a certain apprehension and to avoid others.<sup>33</sup>

Obviously, the postcards supported the promotion of individual artworks or artists thus represented. In addition, the texts on the cards anchored the denotations and connotations of the modernist imagery and served the discursive and material (re)production of a pictorial language understood as *Sturm art*. Similarly, the *Sturm-Künstler* series promoted and directed attention to a social and cultural context denominating individual artists and authors as *Sturm-Künstler*. The metaphorical presence of an artist through his or her portrait on the postcard simultaneously visualized and materialized this relation. If and when the picture postcards were used by Nell and Herwarth Walden and artists affiliated with Sturm, they would have strengthened the corporate identity of the Sturm enterprise.<sup>34</sup> As

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32 The first series had the heading *Gemälde der Futuristen* and contained a wider interpretative frame as there were short texts commenting on the reproduced artworks. On other occasions the principal heading was *Erster Deutscher Herbstsalon* or *Sammlung Walden*. The latter heading concealed, possibly deliberately so, the fact that the Walden collection belonged to Nell Walden.

33 Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image", in: *Image-Music-Text* (1977), New York 1999, 40.

34 A rare example of a message from Herwarth Walden to Karl Kraus, written on a Sturm postcard (Gino Severini's *The Milliner*), is in the Karl-Kraus-Archiv in the Wiener Stadt- und Landesbibliothek. See also George C. Avery, *Feinde in Scharen. Ein wahres Vergnügen dazusein. Karl Kraus – Herwarth Walden Briefwechsel 1909-1912*, Göttingen 2002, 413. On Herwarth Walden as entrepreneur and Sturm as corporate identity, see Barbara Alms, "Der Sturm – Corporate Identity für die internationale Avantgarde" in: *Der Sturm im Berlin der zehner Jahre*, eds. Barbara Alms and Wiebke Steinmetz, Delmenhorst 2000, 15-34; Andrea von Hülsen-Esch, "Das Unternehmen

it turned out though, the Sturm picture postcards were also employed for conflicting agendas.

In the 1920s, Raoul Hausmann appropriated a Sturm postcard with Herwarth Walden's portrait in order to discredit him and the Sturm enterprise. All over Walden's face, Hausmann wrote "*section du merde allemande*", "*l'oeil mal*", "*point du cul*", "*l'oeil bourgeois hausse d'expressionisme*", "*vulgaire=va-gine*", "*caca*" and "*Jésus capitaliste*". Thereafter he sent the postcard with cordial salutations to Theo van Doesburg.<sup>35</sup> This transformation must have been particularly insulting to Herwarth Walden, as it attacked his portrait, which materialized his apparition and thus metaphorically made him present and personally subjected to verbal and material violence. Moreover, the abusive language emphasized the Sturm postcard as a mass-produced object and commercial advertising and used it as material grounds for harsh criticism against Herwarth Walden's capitalist enterprise. Indeed, it implied that his commercial agenda made him incompatible with the avant-garde art field.<sup>36</sup>

## Visual Histories

*Cartes-de-visite* had been collected in albums. One common type of album was the topical or subject album that included collections of reproduced works of art.<sup>37</sup> The majority of these *cartes-de-visite* represented old master paintings and sculptures, whereas reproductions of contemporary artworks seem to have been less common.<sup>38</sup> The usage of picture postcards followed the practises established in relation to *cartes-de-visite*. Thus, also picture postcards were categorized and assembled in albums. Sturm postcards probably were no exception. Indeed, Nell Walden's postcard album, now in the Sturm-Archiv, Berlin, confirms a connection between popular practices of collecting and the Sturm postcards.<sup>39</sup>

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der Sturm und Herwarth Walden als Unternehmer", in: *Der Sturm, Band II: Aufsätze*, eds. Andrea von Hülsen-Esch and Gerhard Finckh, Wuppertal 2012, 201-225.

<sup>35</sup> See Craig Eliason, "Manifestos by Mail: Postcards in the Theo van Doesburg Correspondence", in: *Visual Resources: An International Journal of Documentation*, 17, 2001, n° 4, 449-458.

<sup>36</sup> Obviously, this is one of the key conflicts in the art field as described by Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (1992), Cambridge 1996.

<sup>37</sup> Darrah, *Cartes de Visite*, 9.

<sup>38</sup> William C. Darrah mentions the German company F. & O. Brockmann which issued a series of *cartes-de-visite* with reproductions of classical paintings as well as contemporary artworks (Darrah, *Cartes de Visite*, 109).

<sup>39</sup> Nachlass Nell Walden, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz.

During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, *cartes-de-visite*, picture postcards and other photomechanical reproductions – eventually followed by illustrated art books – expanded knowledge of classical artworks in the collections of western museums to millions of people. Undoubtedly, this was part of a commercialization and commodification of (reproduced) art images. It did however encompass educational ambitions as well.<sup>40</sup> Hence, the appropriation and popularization of high art by the culture industry arguably contributed to the democratization of elite culture.

The reproduction of art was – and indeed continues to be – foundational for the scholarly work of art historians as well. Aby Warburg's *Mnesomyne Atlas* is a well-known example.<sup>41</sup> Unlike reproductions in illustrated books that emanated from the scholarly field of art history, postcards reproducing artworks left the construction of taxonomies and narratives completely open. With a postcard collection, potentially everyone could compile her own *Mnemosyne Atlas* and create myriad discursive and material versions of visual history. Artworks reproduced as postcards thus facilitated an open-ended dialogue between art and other visual material. Indeed, Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* included not only reproductions of art but other visual material too.

## Modernism Diffracted

In their seminal essay on “Semiotics and Art History”, Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson paid attention to the fact that “the text or artwork cannot exist outside the circumstance in which the reader reads the text or the viewer views the image, and [...] the work of art cannot fix in advance the outcome of any of its encounters with contextual plurality”.<sup>42</sup> The Sturm postcards were indeed a means of extending and materializing encounters between modernist aesthetics and contextual plurality. However, the notion of plurality indicates parallel but separate perspectives. If the material meanings of the Sturm postcards were intimately connected to reciprocal processes of translation, as argued above, then we would need to exchange the notion of contextual plurality with *relational multiplicity*. The latter refers to performative interventions, rather than interpretative perspectives, and allows for an understanding of the postcards as a discursive and material phe-

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<sup>40</sup> Darrah, *Cartes de Visite*, 107-111.

<sup>41</sup> See Martin Warnke and Claudia Brink (eds.), *Der Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*, Berlin 2000.

<sup>42</sup> Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, “Semiotics and Art History”, in: *The Art Bulletin*, 73, 1991, n° 2, 179.

nomenon that enacted multiple *versions* of modernist aesthetics.<sup>43</sup> In light of this, we would also need to abandon the common metaphor that defines reproduced images as indexical *reflections* of the artworks represented, and describe instead the picture postcards of Sturm as modernism *diffracted*.<sup>44</sup>

I would like to thank archivist Annelie Ingvarsson at Landskrona Museum who offered prompt assistance with archival material when I was finalizing this chapter. Thanks to Anna Radford for English language editing.

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<sup>43</sup> See also Annemarie Mol, "Ontological Politics: a Word and Some Questions", in: *Actor Network Theory and After*, eds. John Law and John Hassard, Oxford 1999, 74-89.

<sup>44</sup> On diffraction as epistemological metaphor, see Karen Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter", in: *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 28, Spring 2003, n° 3, 801-831.

Magali Nachtergaele

## André Breton's Autobiographical Cut-Ups

Collages, Photographs, and Cinema

In 1924, after the cubist pictorial revolution, the First World War, the discovery of psychoanalysis and Dada's anti-art, André Breton decided that the time had come to set up a new aesthetic, freed from the constraints of realism. His renewed aesthetic system would unveil a new face of life and incite people to liberate themselves from their mediocre, meaningless everyday lives. As such, his project was directed against realistic narrative and bourgeois mythology. According to Breton, narrative *mimesis* and the *arrière-garde* paradigms needed to be dismantled in order to overcome a devastated collective and individual imaginary. In redrafting the preface to *Poisson Soluble* as the *Manifeste du surréalisme*, Breton radically favoured subjectivity against the so-called objective realism of the traditional novel, which had dominated narrative production during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Paradoxically, the anti-realism proclaimed by surrealism appears outdated, as the challenge to *mimesis* had ceased to be a prime issue for the literary avant-gardes. The practice of stream of consciousness writing had shifted the narrative focus onto the intimate depths of the thinking subject well before Breton's surrealist manifesto. One could nevertheless argue that this still represented a mimetic account of psychic operations. For Breton, in regard to method, "the case against the realistic attitude demand[ed] to be examined".<sup>1</sup> His program encompassed a scientific exploration of the unconscious, a revalorization of the "marvellous" and a definition of practices linked to the neologism "surrealism", a term that he uses for the first time in his article "Pour Dada" in the August 1, 1920 issue of *La Nouvelle Revue française*. He calls for an intimate exploration of the mechanisms of subjectivity, or the inner space that houses one's fantasy:

ENCYCL. Philos. "Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of association heretofore neglected, in the omnipotence of the dream, and in the disinterested play of thought. It leads to the permanent destruction of all other psychic mechanisms and to its substitution for them in the solution of the principal problems of life".<sup>2</sup>

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1 "le procès de l'attitude réaliste demande à être instruit" (André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane, Ann Arbor 1972, 313).

2 "Le surréalisme repose sur la croyance à la réalité supérieure de certaines formes d'associations négligées jusqu'à lui, à la toute-puissance du rêve, au jeu désintéressé de la pensée. Il tend à ruiner définitivement tous les autres mécanismes psychiques et à se substituer à eux dans la résolution des principaux problèmes de la vie" (*Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 328).

Breton's ambition was to gain access to the most intimate zones of life, at the deepest level of the human mind, and produce empirical reports with scientific value. Still under the influence of his internship in psychiatry, he searched for signs (or symptoms) of another reality. Knowledge of this reality held the potential to deeply transform everyone's lives. Breton's attempt to create objective reports of inner experience becomes a systematic project in the review *La Révolution surréaliste* and in what he called his "illustrated trilogy", *Nadja* (1928), *L'Amour fou* (Mad Love, 1937) and *Les Vases communicants* (The Communicating Vessels, 1932), each written in the first person. The autobiographical narrative then becomes the privileged experimental field for the narrative dismantling which Breton envisioned from the early 1920s onwards. Significantly this deconstruction of the narrative attests to the profound mutation of a writer's imaginary, in that it associates an aesthetic of the heteroclit with the representation of an *interior text* cut into pieces by images.

In spite of its statement of principle, surrealism's intention to nail "real life" can still be considered in relation to the realism that it condemns. Importantly, however, the conception of "real life" had changed considerably at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Breton takes inspiration from the latest breakthroughs in the domains of science, philosophy and art. Major figures like Sigmund Freud, Albert Einstein, Henri Bergson and Pablo Picasso each, in different ways, played a part in the reconceptualization of reality and inspired the avant-gardes to an exploration of new dimensions in art and literature. Building on these explorations, Breton tries to establish a system for our knowledge of the real, which echoes philosophical models by Berkeley, Hegel and, around 1929, also by Engels. In a dialectical perspective, he turns the aesthetic of collage into the keystone of surrealist imaginary.

For a couple of years and under the influence of Dada, all Breton's work of poetical deconstruction is related to playful, visual and physical enjoyment. Dawn Ades, a photomontage specialist, draws attention to the close link between cubism and "the surrealist aesthetic", reminding us that, according to Breton, there is no rupture between "cubism, futurism and Dada".<sup>3</sup> Working with this perspective of continuity, but focusing particularly on photo and cine-collages, we will see how collage in its various guises enacts a fragmentation of mimetic narrative that inspires Breton to formalize an aesthetic of the surrealist image. The latter is at once inherently linked to photography and to an objective study of the *psyche* or self.

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3 Dawn Ades, "Visions de la matière", in: "Lire le regard : André Breton et la peinture", *Pleine Marge* (Louvain and Arles), ed. Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron, 1993, n° 2, 63.

## Collage as a Philosophical Operation

In 1928, when Breton published his first “autobiographical” narrative *Nadja*, in which text and photographs combine, his eye had been trained not only through the illustrated press, but also via the cinema and the cubist and poetical compositions of the avant-gardes. Avant-garde examples of crossovers between the space of the canvas and that of the page show the intense circulation of two main aesthetic tendencies during this period: one is a *poetic* dynamic of *narrative* deconstruction, directly descending from Mallarmé, and the other is a *visual* dynamic of *mimetic* deconstruction. Together these dynamics give Breton the main elements for the intersecting syntheses that he will develop in 1924 in the *Manifeste du sur-réalisme*. Almost ten years before defining the surrealist image, in a 1916 letter to Théodore Fraenkel, Breton wrote on a superimposed self-portrait, which shows that he was already attuned to the rise of the visual in the textual.<sup>4</sup> The Dada artists, followed by the surrealists, were very aware of what literary production owes to the visual avant-gardes, mainly cubism and futurism. The appearance of texts in pictures and vice-versa inaugurates an era of montage that we can describe as trans-artistic, an era that began with Picasso's *papiers collés* in 1911.<sup>5</sup> Although the surrealists, and especially Breton, conceptualize their link to the image independently from Picasso, they are indebted to the technique of collage. Their representation of “reality” tries to reproduce *tel quel* what the mind has experienced, even if it seems chaotic and pointless. Collage, just like the mixed-media productions, functions like a report constituted by a collection of “indexical objects”, to borrow Rosalind Krauss's expression.<sup>6</sup>

While collage had been known in Paris since the 1911 cubist experiments, the new technique of photomontage first reached Breton via the dadaists, and especially Max Ernst.<sup>7</sup> Ernst had begun to work in Cologne on random combinations called *Fatagaga* with Hans Arp and Johannes Theodor Baargeld, who were more politically committed than the other Berlin dadaists. In April 1920, Breton started corresponding with Ernst, who was immediately adopted by the Parisian group, which at that time included Paul Éluard, Benjamin Péret and Louis Aragon. The following year, the review *Littérature* published a reproduction of the *Relief tricoté* with a short text of the artist. His works were exhibited in May

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4 André Breton, *Je vois, j'imagine. Poèmes-objets*, reproduced in Octavio Paz, Paris 1991, 143.

5 See the historical survey lead on this topic by Michael North, *Camera Works. Photography and the Twentieth Century Word*, Oxford 2005.

6 Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge MA 1989, 203.

7 *Littérature*, May 1921, n° 19, 4 and 5.

1921 at the bookstore Au Sans Pareil in Paris. The exhibition presented photo-montages like *La Santé par le sport*, *Here Everything is Still Floating* or *Anatomie d'un marié* – works in which the title plays a vital role. When Ernst arrived in Paris during the summer of 1922, Breton immediately praised his latest collages. His following illustrated publications, *Répétitions* and *Le Malheur des immortels*, composed with Paul Éluard in 1922, set the tone for the future verbi-visual creation amongst the surrealists.

For the record, it is in the preface of Ernst's first exhibition in 1921 (republished in *Les Pas perdus* in 1924) that Breton presents his definition of the "surrealist image" in regard to Ernst's collages for the first time. By his account, they have: "the marvellous capacity to grasp two mutually distant realities without going beyond the field of our experience and to draw a spark from their juxtaposition".<sup>8</sup> This definition makes another appearance, in a slightly different form, in the *Manifeste*: "It is, as it were, from the fortuitous juxtaposition of the two terms that a particular light has sprung, the light of the image [...]. The value of the image depends on the beauty of the spark obtained".<sup>9</sup> The discovery of Ernst's compositions completed a process in Breton's mind that had been in progress for several years. On the one hand, he acknowledges in the operation of cutting-pasting a similar approach to his own poetical practice already used in *Mont-de-Piété* (1911-1919). On the other, however, he notes that the residual figurative traces of the cubist collages are left behind. Ernst may assemble realistic elements, but he generates disorder, making cracks in the representation and triggering unseen associations that have nothing to do with the standard depiction of reality.

Besides this practice of collage, in which photographs, texts and drawings combine, another technique resulting from direct luminous exposure of objects on bromide paper is also considered as a form of collage: photograms. These artefacts are given a variety of names depending on their author. The pictures made by Christian Schad in 1919 were called "schadographs" by Tristan Tzara, while Man Ray's images were designated "rayographs" in 1921. Although the technique was simultaneously developed on both sides of the Atlantic, Man Ray's became its most famous practitioner. Louis Aragon, in his preface "La Peinture au défi" (Painting Challenged), declares that the "rayographs should be linked to collage

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<sup>8</sup> "la faculté merveilleuse, sans sortir du champ de notre expérience, d'atteindre deux réalités distantes et de leur rapprochement tirer une étincelle" (André Breton, *The Lost Steps*, trans. Mark Polizzotti, Lincoln 1996, 246).

<sup>9</sup> "C'est du rapprochement en quelque sorte fortuit des deux termes qu'a jailli une lumière particulière, lumière de l'image [...]. La valeur de l'image dépend de la beauté de l'étincelle obtenue" (*Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 337).

as a philosophical operation".<sup>10</sup> This not only draws a clear continuity between the *papiers collés*, the photomontages and the photograms, but also establishes a link with the Poem-Object that Breton will develop later on.<sup>11</sup> A similar point is made by the contemporary critic Olivier Quintyn when he explores the notion of *dispositif* as a deconstructive operation of references. His analysis suggests that the *dispositif* leads to a "restatement of mediations" (*retraitement des mediations*)<sup>12</sup> and to a reconfiguration of our perception of reality. But this process of reshaping reality into heterogeneous media is not only limited to an aesthetic or phenomenological perception of the outside world surrounding the subject. It also implies moral and ethic postures. This is underlined by Georges Didi-Huberman in his series of books *L'œil de l'histoire*<sup>13</sup> in which he acknowledges the deep power of the photomontage on minds throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For Didi-Huberman, collage and photomontage reconfigure our vision of the historical course of time, and therefore, use the effect of estrangement to set a critical distance between the subject and his perceptions.<sup>14</sup> That explains why high regard for Man Ray was not limited to his dadaist experiment. More than anyone else he contributed to the changing understanding of photography. His work shows that photography cannot be considered a pure mimetic window on reality, but instead adds new meaning to reality.

A wide and entangled understanding of the notion of collage sheds new light on the artistic and poetic activity of the Parisian avant-gardes. It enables us to move from Marcel Duchamp's first ready-made *Roue de bicyclette* (1913) to Ernst's *Fatagaga* and Hannah Höch's photomontages. In each, the artist takes part in the very same "art of conception" that Pierre Reverdy perceived in the poetry of the day.<sup>15</sup> In his *Art of Poetry*, Horace, eerily anticipating surrealism, denounced precisely this art of assembling because "such pictures would be a book whose idle fancies shall be shaped like a sick man's dreams".<sup>16</sup> Max Ernst's works correspond exactly to what Horace presents as the antithesis of poetical arrangement. Aragon and Breton quickly become aware of this reversal of values. This brings

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10 Les "rayographes devraient être reliés au collage en tant qu'opération philosophique", Louis Aragon, "La Peinture au défi", in: *Exposition de collages : Arp, Braque, Dali, Duchamp, Ernst, Miro, Magritte, Man Ray, Picabia, Picasso, Tanguy*, exh. cat., Paris, Galerie Goemans, 29 March-12 April 1930, 1930, our translation.

11 Aragon, "La Peinture au défi", n.p.

12 Olivier Quintyn, *Dispositifs/dislocations*, Paris 2009, 55.

13 Georges Didi-Huberman, *Quand les images prennent position. L'œil de l'histoire 1*, Paris 2009.

14 Didi-Huberman, *Quand les images prennent position*, 69.

15 Brandon Taylor, *Collage. The Making of Modern Art*, London 2004, 67-69.

16 Horace, *Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough and William Heine-mann, Cambridge and London 1929, 451.